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EUGENIO COSERIU, SCANDINAVIAN LINGUISTS AND VARIATIONAL LINGUISTICS

INTRODUCTION

In the last decades the variational linguistics has had a central role in the study of Romance languages. In a recent article Harald Völker from University of Zürich has described the founding and development of this theory dedicated to the study of language variation (Völker 2009). In variational linguistics you describe the language situation in a language community as a 'language architecture' with different diasystems: with diatopic, diastratic, diaphasic, diamesic (and diachronic) varieties. It is emphasized by Völker that this type of theory is based on structuralism. The first generally quoted founding father is the Norwegian linguist Leiv Flydal who introduced the terms diatopic (for the spatial axis) and diastratic (for the social axis) in an article in 1951. Almost at the same time, but probably independently, the Swiss linguist Uriel Weinreich introduced the terms 'variety' and 'diasystem'. But it was probably the Romanian born linguist Eugenio Coseriu who at a conference in 1964 accomplished the decisive step forward to a linguistic tradition on its own, in that he „resumed, unified, modified, and especially promoted the terminological instruments proposed by Flydal and Weinreich by confirming the terms of *diasystem*, *diatopic* and *diastratic* … and by introducing a new dimension [...] *diaphasic* [...]"[1].

This is a history told before, though not so detailed[2]. What is certainly new in Völker's theoretical introduction is that he, a bit surprisingly, includes the Danish linguist Louis Hjelmslev as an extra founding father of the variational linguistics,

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[1] „Eugenio Coseriu a repris, unifié, modifié et surtout promu les instruments terminologiques proposés par Flydal et Weinreich en confirmant l'usage des termes *diasystème, diatopique et diastratique* … et en introduisant une dimension nouvelle … *diaphasique* … " (Völker 2009, p. 32).

[2] See for example Berruto 1987, pp. 13, 20, 63, and Berruto 1995, p. 65, p. 125. Concerning the history G. Berruto is mainly quoting J. Albrecht 1986: „'Substandard' and 'Subnorm'. Die nicht-exemplarischen Ausprägungen der 'Historischen Sprache' aus varietätenlinguistischer Sicht", in *Sprachlicher Substandard I,* ed. Holtus/Radtke, Tübingen 1986, pp. 65–88.

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giving a new and quite original interpretation of a chapter (XXII) in Hjelmslev's best known publication *Omkring sprogteoriens grundlæggelse*[3]. In this chapter Hjelmslev presents the term *connotator* which, according to Völker, somehow is reflecting the different dia-dimensions mentioned before.

In this presentation the focus will be on the interplay of the theories of Coseriu and the two Scandinavian linguists. Coseriu is „the center" of the presentation. Focus will be on the theories, but occasionally I will include parts of Coseriu's life – based on a long interview with Coseriu in 1994–1995 (Kabatek, Murguía 1997). Coseriu often used examples from the Italian language situation to explain the dia-dimensions, so, since I am an Italianist, I will also include some of Coseriu's examples from the Italian language.

QUESTIONS TO BE DISCUSSED

The main question is: *How was the interplay between Coseriu and the Scandinavian linguists Hjelmslev and Flydal – and which role has this interplay had for the evolution of variational linguistics?*

More specific the following points will be treated: 1. Which ideas do Coseriu and Hjelmslev have in common – and which are the main points in Coseriu's critique of Hjelmslev? 2. What is the relationship between the glossematic theory (Hjelmslev) and the „dia-approaches" of Flydal and Coseriu? 3. How does Coseriu use the diaconcepts in specific analyses of Italian? 4. Which research fields concerning variational linguistics could be relevant as a consequence of the exposition?

In the presentation in particular some contributions from these following four linguists will be mentioned, i.e.: Ferdinand de Saussure (1857–1913), Louis Hjelmslev (1899–1965), Leiv Flydal (1904–1983) and Eugenio Coseriu (1921–2002). Since Coseriu is the reason for the presentation at this conference, we will start by Coseriu, but it is important to remember that he is the youngest one.

EUGENIO COSERIU

Eugenio Coseriu was born in 1921 in Romania, in the Bessarabian/Moldavian part. He left for a scholarship in Italy in 1940. Short time after the political situation in his home region changed totally. Coseriu never came to live in Romania any more, but stayed abroad for the rest of his life, in Italy, Uruguay and Germany[4].

In an interview Coseriu lists the most important persons for the development of his linguistic theory: Aristotle, Vico, Hegel, Humboldt and Saussure (Kabatek, Murguía 1997, p. 168). While Coseriu's writings about the former four in general have the character of an upgrading of their importance, his approach to the more

[3] In this presentation I will quote the English translation: *Prolegomena to a Theory of Language*.
[4] Kabatek, Murguía 1997, pp. 1–123 and the chronological table, pp. 269–270.

contemporary Saussure is a more critical discussion, where Coseriu expresses many reserves.

Saussure, normally seen as the founder of Structural Linguistics in the 20th century, enumerates, describes and connects a number of dichotomies. He makes an absolute opposition between the synchronic and the diachronic point of view on language[5], he focuses on the study of *langue* („the system of language") rather than *parole* („the speech") (Saussure 1916, pp. 23–35). As a third point Saussure expresses that essentially language is *form* not *substance* (Saussure 1916, pp. 164; see also E. Fischer-Jørgensen 1975, pp. 14–15).

Coseriu softens Saussure's sharp distinction between synchrony and diachrony, giving history a place also in the synchronic analysis, among other things because Coseriu thinks that the speaker has knowledge of the language (structure) in different periods, and often will be conscious of using a word from an older synchronic stage (Coseriu 1988a, pp. 273–275; Kabatek, Murguía 1997, p. 162). Coseriu also has a critical analysis of the Saussurian distinction langue/parole and introduces a three partition: system, norm, speech (Coseriu 1988a, pp. 297–299).

Coseriu defines himself as a developer of Structuralism in some of his works, in particular in structural semantics (Kabatek, Murguía 1997, p. 161). In others he sees himself going beyond the Structuralism (*ibidem*). He underlines that the Structuralist method can only be used „within definite limits and for definite facts"[6].

Coseriu calls his own linguistics „Integral linguistics" including „three linguistics": the linguistics of speech in general, the linguistics of the languages and the text linguistics[7]. This statement is among other things meant as a critique of a one-sided Structuralist focusing on the language structure. In fact Coseriu emphasizes the need to regain aspects of the language and the speech, aspects which, according to him, have been excluded in the Structuralism. Coseriu also regards the dia-dimensions as going „beyond Structuralism"[8].

LOUIS HJELMSLEV

While Coseriu always takes his reserves with respect to Saussure, the Danish linguist Louis Hjelmslev more sees himself as outworking the Saussurian frame. Hjelmslev gives priority to synchronic analysis of the 'structure of language' ('schema' by Hjelmslev, rather parallel to *la langue* by Saussure), and he focuses on *form* in the examining of the language, somehow expressing that at the starting points in the analysis it is possible to separate form from substance. Hjelmslev tries in his analysis to find the smallest (and fewest) elements of the language ('langue'), in this way examining the similarities between algebra and languages (language

[5] Saussure 1916, p. 119: „L'opposition entre les deux points de vue – synchronique et diachronique – est absolue et ne souffre pas de compromis".

[6] „In bestimmten Grenzen und für bestimmte Fakten" (Kabatek, Murguía 1997, p. 161).

[7] „Linguistik des Sprechens, der Sprachen und des Textes" (Kabatek, Murguía 1997, pp. 159–160).

[8] „Au-delà du structuralisme" (Kabatek, Murguía 1997, p. 161).

structure). The fundamental aim is to develop a secure fundament for a typology of languages. Though the glossematic theory with Hjelmslev as the main figure has been more discussed than applied, Hjelmslev's theory and method were very influential in the linguistic discussions in the 20th century[9]. Several of Hjelmslev's concepts have got a permanent place in the vocabulary of linguistics (e.g. paradigmatic, commutation test, expression-level and content-level) as recognized by E. Coseriu (Coseriu 1988a, p. 124).

A famous example from Hjelmslev's analysis is a diagram, where he shows the correspondences between Danish (*træ, skov*), German (*Baum, Holz, Wald*) and French (*arbre, bois, forêt*). He wants to show that „the same zone of purport" has a different form in different languages, what he calls „the content-form", and which „from the point of view of the purport is arbitrary" (Hjelmslev 1953 [1943], pp. 33–34). He takes this as evidence for the fact that „Saussure is clearly correct in distinguishing between form and substance" (Hjelmslev 1953 [1943], p. 34).

On the one hand Coseriu expresses great recognition of Hjelmslev's glossematics because of Hjelmslev's precision with his focus and the limits within he worked (Kabatek, Murguía 1997, p. 152), and because Hjelmslev „laid the foundation for the possibility of a structural semantics with his idea that the content-level of language can be analyzed in a way analogous to the level of expression" (Coseriu, Geckeler 1981, p. 33). On the other hand Coseriu criticizes the glossematics for treating language – **exclusively** as a formal system. Coseriu accepts that you can choose to **analyze** the language as a formal system, but then you are only analyzing **one** aspect of languages which for Coseriu are „objects of culture" (Coseriu 1988a, pp. 100–101). In an influential essay (1954) Coseriu in particular criticizes Hjelmslev's sharp separation of form from substance, in this place with respect to speech sound. And as regards structural semantics, which is an important field in Coseriu's theory, he praises Hjelmslev as a forerunner as mentioned above, but then parts from a critique of Hjelmslev, repeating the critique of Hjelmslev for disregarding substance, here with respect to semantics: according to Coseriu, Hjelmslev „completely eliminates semantic substance (Coseriu, Geckeler 1981, p. 33). The relation Hjelmslev – Coseriu will be treated further later in the article.

TWO FRIENDSHIPS

The Danish phonologist Eli Fischer-Jørgensen, a rather school independent linguist but in much contact with Hjelmslev and participating in the glossematic discussion, in her important essay *Trends in Phonological Theory Until 1975* (Fischer-Jørgensen 1995 [1975]) agrees with Coseriu's critique of Hjelmslev concerning the analysis of form and substance[10].

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[9] The summary of the Hjelmslevian theory leans on Fischer-Jørgensen 1975.

[10] Fischer-Jørgensen 1995, pp. 124–125. In another place Coseriu's monograph on form and substance is called „the most thorough and penetrating study existing on his subject", p. 365. E.Fischer-Jørgensen gives also a positive evaluation of Coseriu's discussions of „explanations" in Coseriu 1974 [1954], called a „very interesting book" (pp. 388–389).

In the interview book Coseriu mentions two friendships with Scandinavian linguists: the one is with Eli Fischer-Jørgensen, the other with the Norwegian linguist Leiv Flydal (Kabatek, Murguía 1997, p. 93).

LEIV FLYDAL

Leiv Flydal in many occasions refers directly to glossematics as his basis[11]. On the other hand – in his now famous article from 1951 where he introduces two of the dia-concepts, he does almost not mention Hjelmslev, he parts from a disagreement with the Saussurian view that the speaker has no consciousness of earlier language stages, and finally he is continuing a thought of the linguist Hans Vogt who in 1947 introduced the concept 'partial systems' in an article with a quite critical view on Hjelmslev's way of doing linguistics (Flydal 1951)[12]. So although Flydal in general can be considered a follower of Hjelmslevian glossematics, he does not really discuss in the article whether his new concepts, 'architecture of language', 'diatopic' and 'diastratic' go along with the Hjelmslev glossematics[13].

In his contribution Flydal identifies 'simultaneous language structures'[14] within natural languages, i.e. sub-structures that differ substantially from the texts' „normal" language and are connected with extralinguistic factors like the diachronic, the diatopic and the diastratic axis. And in order to describe all these regular sub-structures within a language he uses the notion of 'architecture of language'.

Flydal explains that his inspiration to the last term, *architecture de langue*, has come from Hjelmslev who had used the term '*charpente*' – what is important is though that Hjelmslev used it for something different: as a synonym for 'schema'/'language structure', while Flydal emphasizes that 'architecture' is something different from 'structure', since the 'architecture' is including 'extrastructuralisms' which could be interpreted as elements from '*parole*'[15]. So the fact that Flydal elaborates on a Hjelmslevian concept does not specify how Flydal's 'architecture and dia-theory' is connected to Hjelmslev's overall theory.

Apart from the new concepts Flydal is also important for the development of variational linguistics by the facts that he is personalizing an effort to combine stylistics with glossematics and that he is working in the field of Romance languages.

VARIATIONAL LINGUISTICS BY COSERIU

As told at the beginning of my contribution it was Coseriu who accomplished the decisive step forward for variational linguistics to form a linguistic tradition on its

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[11] For example Flydal 1989, p. 48 (a text from 1954), p. 111 (a text from 1962).

[12] Vogt 1947, by Vogt it is mostly expressed indirectly that the critique concerns Hjelmslev.

[13] The article is in French, so the concepts by Flydal are '*architecture de langue, diatopique, diastratique*'.

[14] *„Structures de langue simultanées"* (Flydal 1951, p. 244).

[15] This interpretation is following Völker 2009, pp. 30–31.

own. Coseriu takes from Flydal the distinction between language **structure** and language **architecture**. According to Coseriu a **functional language** is a homogene language with definite (opposition) relations which make an 'inner structure'. In a **historic language** coexist different forms that come from different functional languages, together these make the architecture of the historical language, e.g. Italian (Coseriu 1988a, pp. 285–286).

Coseriu gives the example of the use in the historic language Italian of *passato prossimo* and *passato remoto* (e.g. *ho fatto / feci*), since the use has a geographic, diatopic, variation. In the North you use in general only *passato prossimo*, in the South in general only *passato remoto*, and in Tuscany both – but in different situations. Coseriu explains that from a structure point of view you have to consider each regional, diatopic, variety as a functional language, each one with specific oppositions:

Language structure in different functional languages:

North:	*ho fatto*	> <	*faccio, farò, ecc.*
South:	*feci*	> <	*faccio, farò, ecc.*
Tuscany:	*ho fatto>< feci*	> <	*faccio, farò, ecc.*

Read horizontally the oppositions reflect the structure of the three functional languages. Read vertically you are not talking of oppositions, but of variation, and you picture the architecture of the historic language Italian from a diatopic point of view[16].

RESEARCH FIELDS

On this background I will turn back to the fourth question. Which research fields concerning variational linguistics could be relevant as a consequence of the exposition? To answer this question it is useful to return to Völker's statement that Hjelmslev's connotator theory can be seen as a forerunner to variational linguistics.

The 'connotators' are introduced almost at the end of Hjelmslev's *Prolegomena*. Until then Hjelmslev has worked with „the premiss that the given text displays structural homogeneity … This premiss, however, does not hold good in practice", because texts „usually contains derivates that rest on different systems" (Hjelmslev 1953 [1943], p. 73), and can be composed of for example:

- different value-styles (higher, lower etc.)
- different media (speech, writing etc.)
- different regional languages (standard language, local dialect etc.)

„The individual members of each of these classes and the units resulting from their combination we shall call *connotators*" (Hjelmslev 1953 [1943], p. 74).

[16] Coseriu 1988a, pp. 295–96: „Im Norden steht der Typ *ho fatto* beispielsweise in Opposition zu *faccio, farò*; im Süden steht eben diesen Formen der Typ *feci* gegenüber; und im Toskanischen stehen *feci* und *ho fatto* zum einen in Opposition zueinander und zum anderen in Opposition zu *faccio*, *farò*, usw.".

It is not the place here to expose in detail the Hjelmslevian ‘connotator theory’. But it is worth mentioning that it is not obvious that this part theory fits into the general theory of Hjelmslev, which leads to a first research field: How does ‘the connotator theory’ fit into the general theory of Hjelmslev?

In Denmark appeared two doctoral dissertations on Hjelmslev around 1990.

Frans Gregersen, who has a rather critical approach towards Hjelmslev’s structuralism, treats Hjelmslev’s connotator concept in just 3 pages, and puts it in a critical frame arguing that the connotator concept is used by Hjelmslev to explain the heterogeneity of the text, but does not resolve the fundamental problem in Hjelmslev’s theory: how to treat and discover the structural homogeneity of language? According to Gregersen Hjelmslev takes for granted that all can be translated to natural languages and they can all be translated to each other because of a common meaning. Frans Gregersen interprets here Hjelmslev as a sort of ”Platonist” having an idea of an universal meaning behind the languages (Gregersen 1991, pp. 323–325).

Michael Rasmussen who general consents more to Hjelmslev’s theory and „defends” it against „Platonian” labels, treats ‘the connotator theory’ on 8–10 pages, with no critical points – but he does not include it in his conclusion, so the position of ‘the connotator theory’ in the overall Hjelmslev theory is not so clearly expressed (Rasmussen 1992).

Harald Völker does not in his article discuss the role of ‘the connotator theory’ in Hjelmslev’s general theory. If you accept Völker’s opinion that Hjelmslev somehow is a founding father of variational linguistics, it is important to examine thoroughly how ‘the connotator theory’ fits into Hjelmslev’s overall theory, hereby include Coseriu’s statement that the ‘architecture approach’ is beyond Structuralism.

A second research field stems from the fact that Coseriu and Hjelmslev disagreed on several rather fundamental views on language. If you, like Völker, somehow see them both as founding fathers of variational linguistics, you have to explain how their quite important disagreements can be overcome in a common theory. So I think, in particular as regards the theoretical development of variational linguistics, there is a need for a more thoroughly systematical comparison of Coseriu’s and Hjelmslev’s linguistic theories, including the „connotator part” by Hjelmslev.

CONCLUSIONS

1. The interplay between the theories of Coseriu and of the Scandinavian linguists Hjelmslev and Flydal has had an important impact on the development of variational linguistics.

2. Flydal, and in particular Coseriu, have had an important role in the diffusion of variational linguistics in the study of Romance languages.

3. Variational linguistics has until now been a very fruitful approach, but could risk becoming a too conventional apparatus, if you are not continuously discussing the content in the terms and the relations between them.

4. One way to evitate this is to do studies in the differences and similarities between Coseriu, Hjelmslev and Flydal, and in the internal consistency by the three linguists.

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Abstract

The Romanian linguist Eugenio Coseriu (1921–2002), who lived most of his academic career in Italy, Uruguay and Germany, had several contacts, personally and theoretically, with Scandinavian linguists. This interplay has been of great importance in international linguistics, among other things in the evolution of variational linguistics. The presentation will be focused on Coseriu's relationship to the theories of the Danish linguist Louis Hjelmslev and the Norwegian linguist Leiv Flydal. Firstly it will be demonstrated how Coseriu on one hand recognized Hjelmslev as one of the most important founders of modern linguistics and on the other hand distanced himself from Hjelmslev's glossematic theory as part of exposing his own theory. Secondly it will be shown how Coseriu further develops some linguistic concepts introduced by Flydal. Flydal followed the glossematics of Hjelmslev, but was a founding father of variational linguistics, introducing the concepts of '*architecture de langue*', and '*perspectives diatopique et diastratique*'. Among other things Coseriu adds another dimension, '*diafatique*'. Finally will be pointed at some research fields concerning the history (and the future) of variational linguistics.

Keywords: *Variational linguistics, structuralism, connotators, architecture of language, Coseriu, Hjelmslev, Flydal*.

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